



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION
MEDIA STATEMENT
LEVEL 4 RISK ADJUSTED MEASURES IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN
RESPONSE TO COVID 19

08 MAY 2020

Good morning, members of the media. Thank you for making time to attend this media engagement session.

We meet at a time when our country is being ravaged by the coronavirus or better known as COVID-19. It is especially important in a period like this to reflect on the **fundamental values enshrined in our Constitution, upon which, the South African State is founded. These values are an embodiment of our aspirations as a nation premised on amongst others, human dignity; the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms; non-racialism and non-sexism.**

In advancing these values section 195 of **the Constitution requires the public administration to be governed by principles** that require-

1. A high standard of professional ethics being promoted and maintained;
2. Services to be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias;
3. The promotion of efficient, and effective use of resources;

4. A development-oriented public administration; and
5. An accountable public administration.

The work of the Ministry and Department of Public Service and Administration is informed by these basic values and principles governing Public Administration and place the Ministry and Department at the centre of building a capable, ethical and developmental state. This requires us to modernise government focusing on, amongst others, innovation and efficiency.

The enactment of the Public Service Act, 1994 ushered in a new era in the South African public service premised on transformation and a new democratic dispensation. **In seeking to entrench the Constitutional values and principles, the public service adopted the Batho Pele principles with the vision of “A better life for all South Africans by putting people first”.**

Academics and politicians, globally, have debated the role of the State over time including at times of upheavals and instability. The role of the State has shifted to the spotlight, depending on how effective it discharges its current responsibilities under the current circumstances we find ourselves in, the State may re-evolve. When the COVID-19 outbreak attacked humanity across the globe, the question arose: “What should be the role of the State, how will the State respond?”

In our case, the State sought to protect the citizens against primarily the infection of the COVID-19 and the harsh effects on the people whilst

also supporting the economy during a time when restricted movement is necessary. Our State, represented by our Government, has provided decisive leadership in our fight against the COVID-19. At all times cognisant of our Constitutional obligations, Government has ensured-

- **Accountability and ethics** – Government has had to take various decisions to support the citizens, but that had to be done in an accountable manner through consultation with stakeholders in the public sector, private sector, academia, business and society generally. All measures requiring the highest ethical standards.
- **Collaboration with experts in both the private and public sector-** Government has had to perform its obligations in a manner that is evidence-driven taking into account contributions from experts in the relevant fields.
- **On greater policy certainty,** we based our approach on a broad policy of providing health care to all and providing financial support to all citizens based on need and affordability.
- **Promptness and decisiveness in decision making in relation to Lockdown** funding and criteria for business and individuals, Disaster Management Regulations are in place to contain the spread of the COVID-19 and economic policies and strategies are developed to alleviate some of the financial impact of the COVID-19.

- **Efficiency in implementation** – Implementation of measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 have been implemented through the work of our health care professionals, defence, SAPS and other dedicated public servants.
- **Capacity of the public servants-** public servants have been capacitated through a plethora of guidelines and skills relating to COVID-19. The issue of PPEs remain a concern in some areas and is receiving the attention of the Department of Health to ensure the safety of frontline health workers. To facilitate accurate response depending on the circumstances, stakeholders in specific facilities are encouraged to ensure alertness of the Department of Health on needs.

Above all these measures taken, this is the time when we should conscientise public servants that for them, **it is now more than ever, necessary to recognise this higher calling of being a public servant, premised on patriotism and the urge go above and beyond for fellow South Africans requiring such public services.** This applies to both elected and appointed public servants in the public service and in the public sector at large, it cannot be about the rank you hold but rather about what you can do to help. **This is not the time for opportunistic corrupt activities or plundering and pillaging of state resources. Public servants must rise to the mammoth task before them to be the public service that the Constitution dictates we should be.**

Public servants have been rendering exceptional services to South Africans in various fields, such as health, defence, immigration and safety, among others. Our State has progressed from serving a few, to serving all citizens. This is usually evidenced during the month of September each year when we honour public servants by celebrating Public Service Month. **However our true test, as the public service, will be how we support the citizens of South Africa during this period of turmoil where dependence on the State for services will be especially higher.** We take this opportunity to honour all public servants in the Country, especially those who are not working from home but are occupying the frontlines and support, we also take this opportunity to honour the heroes and heroines, who in the course of their duties passed on. May God bless their souls and our sympathies to their families.

The COVID-19 invaded South Africa at a time when government was hard at work to revive a declining economy, fight poverty and hunger and improve the living conditions of our people. In the past, we have endured a number of challenges including TB and HIV, but so far the COVID-19 seems to be more daunting especially since there are so many unknowns about this virus. **The current position we find ourselves in, will test the capability of the State to the maximum. We are hard at work doing an overall interrogation of the current capabilities of the State in a number of areas to assess, adjust and adapt our operations for the future to deliver optimal services during this pandemic. At this stage, it becomes relevant to borrow from Abraham Lincoln “The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high**

with difficulty, and we must rise – with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew.”

As we move through the various alert levels, we need to plan for the normalisation of the Public Service.

On 23 April 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a Risk Adjusted Approach to slowly unlock economic activities in some sectors in phases, easing some of the restrictions effected during the National Lockdown placed on 26 March 2020, in response to measures needed to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

The phased strategy consists of 5 levels detailing how activities will be opened up to bring back some normality, while taking cognisance of the presence of the virus, with Level 5 referred to as the Lockdown Phase.

The country is now on level 4. **Level 4 allows for the easing of some of the restrictions put in place during the National Lockdown, thereby gradually unlocking certain economic activities to resume without compromising progress made in the containment of the COVID-19.**

During this transition between the levels, the focus of the Public Service is to continuously ensure the provision of services required for the effective functioning of the government and to ensure necessary support for all sectors that will become incrementally active during the various levels.

For government to facilitate the unlocking of economy, there will be a need for more public servants to return to the workplace to provide services that will be required by those sectors that are part of the Level 4 phase, over and above other basic services that were part of the critical and essential services during the lockdown period.

The Department of Public Service and Administration (**DPSA**) **has issued many circulars, the latest being Circular No 18 of 2020**, to the entire Public Service that details necessary measures which national and provincial departments ought to implement to ensure the containment and management of the COVID-19 in the Public Service.

In developing the circulars, we took into consideration various relevant laws, such as Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997, Disaster Management Act, 2005, Labour Relations Act, 1995, Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1994 and Public Service Regulations, 2016. The Department will be working on a framework that articulates details on norms and standards that should apply as many public servants who work from home.

These circulars provide guidance on occupational health and safety measures required within the workplace to contain the spread of the virus.

Amongst the provisions in this Circular require departments to set up **internal COVID-19 Steering Committees to put in place implementation plans** at the different levels of alertness, to demonstrate how departments will ensure service delivery with sufficient capacity, for government services

to return to normality, while ensuring necessary precautionary health and safety measures. As a directive, departments are reminded that all employment conditions and agreements are to be observed with necessary flexibilities of working from home. Care should be given on all pertinent issues including leave arrangements for employees and reporting mechanisms in relation to gaps caused by lack of laptops for each employee.

The COVID-19 committees must continuously monitor the implementation of their departmental strategies, risk assessments, workplace procedures and systems to counter the spread of COVID-19, and provide reports to the National Steering Committee.

While it is clear that as the different alert levels are implemented, not all Public Service employees in all departments are able to return to work immediately, Directors-General (DGs) and Heads of Departments (HoDs) should ensure that ensure that employees with co-morbidities or underlying illnesses, as far as is possible, remain at home or/and work remotely until the pandemic has passed as they remain vulnerable to contracting the virus. If for whatever reason such employees are required to attend the workplace, it is incumbent on relevant DGs and HoDs take the necessary measures to ensure their employees' wellbeing at the workplace.

STAGGERED RETURN TO WORK

All DGs and HoDs are directed to **ensure that all health and precautionary measures** to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19 are adhered to in

their respective departments by implementing systems that will manage issues of hygiene and social distancing upon the return of employees to the workplace.

Given that during the lockdown period, government operations were required to continue and **departments had already identified the critical services that required employees to be physically present at workplaces while others were adapted for online services or remote working**, it is advised that with the increasing demands of the easing of the lockdown, departments may need to identify more employees responsible for such critical services and recall them back to office, if necessary, to supplement capacity.

In line with the recent circular issued to all DGs and HoDs:

- Departments must **develop a schedule for a staggered return** of the workforce which will assist in managing the number of employees at the workplace at the same time to maintain service and business continuity;
- This **schedule must be disseminated to all employees** and to the relevant sectors in support of the restart of the economy;
- DGs and HoDs must ensure that employees who are required to be at the workplace be issued with the **requisite permit authorising travel** for work purposes;
- To **limit the number of employees arriving, leaving or working at the same time**, the DGs and HoDs should consider amending working times to minimise the risk associated with the simultaneous arrival and departure of employees;

- **To reduce the number of employees at the same time in common areas**, such as kitchens and canteens, the staggering of employees' meal intervals should be considered.

REMOTE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

As indicated above, social distancing is an important consideration and as such **remote work has become an important mechanism in the fight against the spread of this COVID-19 disease.**

Where employees can work remotely from their homes, departments are encouraged to continue with this approach, taking into consideration the requirements as outlined in Circular 15 of 2020 with regard to critical and essential services.

Furthermore, departments are urged to strengthen such capabilities by **ensuring that employees have necessary resources for remote working and are productively utilised.**

It must also be clarified that although employees may be working remotely, they may also be required from time to time to attend the workplace, to among others, receive instructions, documentation, access office infrastructure and to submit completed tasks.

DGs and HoDs, must make a determination on employees' readiness to work remotely, **bearing in mind the higher risk the COVID-19 poses to older employees and those that present with co-morbidities. Those employees will be expected to submit evidential documentation to their Human Resources.**

The decision on remote working must be made with due consideration to the service delivery needs of the Departments.

WORKPLACE PREPARATION IN RESPONSE TO THE EASING OF THE LOCKDOWN

As Departments prepare for the opening and return of employees, which is not now, a **thorough cleaning of the workplace** will have to undertaken to ensure it is clean and hygienic, and that all guidelines outlined in Circular 7 of 2020 as they pertain to the preparation for the containment and management of COVID-19 in the public service are observed.

These include **temperature screening** for each employee entering the building and **mandatory wearing of cloth masks** at all times in the workplace by non-medical personnel. **Placing of hand sanitizers strategically** at entrances, common areas, doorways, lifts/elevators, escalators, handrails, where office equipment is shared etc.

Visits to the workplace by non-employees must be by prior arrangement and only where absolutely necessary. This excludes

service recipients at service delivery points. **The details of such visitors must be recorded for track and trace purposes.**

All employees whose operational requirements require **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** should at all times be provided with such. In assisting employees who need support in relation to the impact of COVID-19, departments should ensure that the requisite Employee Assistance Programmes are available to offer such support.

CONCLUSION

Government further urges citizens to utilise online services where available so as to lessen physical interaction and minimise the risk associated with the transmission of COVID-19 while trying to bring in necessary services back into operation.

COVID-19 remains a threat to everyone and therefore extra care should always be exercised by public servants who are performing their duties during this challenging period. It is worrying to note that, to date, 511 health workers have been infected with the virus, including a doctor and a nurse who have lost their lives.

At this juncture, we would also like to express our gratitude to essential and frontline public servants for their sterling work amid the challenges we are going through as a country. Their dedication and commitment give us hope that we will turn the corner in the fight against COVID-19 and should serve as a reminder to public servants that “We Belong, We Care and We serve”.

Thank you!

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